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THE MOVEMENT POETS WITH REFERENCE TO PHILIP LARKIN

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ABSTRACT

Modernist poets wanted their poetry to be read seriously. They felt that the modern age was fragmented and that it had manifold aspects. If these were to be presented in poetry, the language of poetry had to reflect this fragmentariness and this multitudiousness. So they fragmented and fractured language. They used concrete imagery. Their intention was to reflect the non-rational nature of life in their poetry. So they made their poetry non-discursive. To indicate both the continuity and the non-continuity with the past, they used allusions to earlier literatures and history. These tendencies made their poetry difficult to follow. Modernist poets like Yeats, Eliot and Auden wanted their readers to take the trouble of unraveling their meaning if the readers were serious about it.

KEYWORDS: The Movement Poets, Philip Larkin, Modernist Poets, Yeats, Eliot and Auden

INTRODUCTION

Their successors had a different approach to these problems. They want back to the romantic idea that poetry had to be responsive to the present conditions but the same time wanted it to be intelligible to the people who had the average intellectual equipment and the average acquaintance with the world they lived in and its history. They did not want the language and the technique to be too formidable for the average man. They therefore wrote a simple kind of poetry. Yet they did not turn away from all the technical nuances that the modernists had taught them through their example. They also continued the anti-romantic tendencies of their predecessors. They had a gentle sense of irony. This helped them to present their themes without exaggerations. They shied away from too abstract questions and theories. Normally they stuck to the simple events and experiences of life. Yet they found that these took them to deep speculations. These speculations became more enlightening to the reader in terms of experience in their poetry.

Philip Larkin is one of the Movement Poets. His detractors talk of his gloom, philistinism, insularity, and anti-modernism. But his long poems have authority and grandiloquence, and his shorter poems have grace, sharpness and humour. He has a clear-eyed engagement with love, marriage, freedom, destiny, ageing, death, and other fat from marginal subjects. The whole volume of his poetry together has made him an authentic poet. He dominates his time as Eliot dominated his. He acknowledged the poetry of Thomas Hardy as one of the great influences on him,. Several other post-modern poets also went for schooling to Hardy rather than to the modernists.

Larkin constructed a persona for himself in his poems: plain-speaking, skeptical, modest, unsown, awkward, commonsensical, even rather dry and dull. This persona agreed with the tone of the Movement poets. Of course some of this was allied to earlier poets like Eliot: the self-deprecatory style of characters like Alfred Prufrock. But Larkin’s persona prefers to keep himself in the atmosphere of certain privations: there is something faintly comic about this persona’s circumstances. The narrator almost miserably excludes himself from the joys of sex, or the consolations of religion, or the excitements of social rebellion. His life seems to be compromised or squatted on by “the road work.”

> But at best Larkin makes matters of obsessive concern to him—whether to marry, how to face the idea of death, what we owe to others (especially our parents) and ourselves, to what extent we control our lives—into rich dramatic monologues, inviting the reader to listen in as he thinks aloud, venturing one tentative explanation then overturning it with another, filling his speech with the hesitations and self-corrections … that seem to guarantee the speaker's honesty. The Larkin persona is a subtle and elaborate construct, even a mask though he was perhaps right to feel that his work was fat more direct, emotional, and even naïve than critics acknowledged.(Jeremy Noel-Tod, Ian Hamilton, p.336).

In his later poems Larkin seems to be speaking to other men and perhaps less to women. There is a greater refinement of manner and enlargement of scope. His use of the vernacular, the slangy familiarities and obscenities somehow give the ring of reality to his poetry. Yet there is an epigrammatic quality in his poetry. Some of his lines just float up free of their immediate context: "Nothing, like something happens anywhere." Very often he uses the spacious eight-line stanza with a complex rhyme pattern. The pattern of his poetry is almost always the same: the citing of the speaker in a particular place, then the slow opening out of one man's tentative musings into a large, confident, universal statement.

Larkin's poetry is often somber, glimpsing the loneliness, emptiness, and mortality that i.e. underneath social rituals. The ideas in his poems, baldly stated, can sound chilling and depressing, closely approaching the absurd ideology. We always make the wrong choice, supposing we have any choice at all. The sense we have of a li9fe lived according to love makes the compromised, loveless reality almost unendurable: human existence is bearable because the prospect of death is worse. But there is something life-enhancing about his determination to find phrase-making, disabused summations of everything from childhood to marriage. He is capable of empathy and he is capable of imaginative engagement with the poor, with ordinary lives.

"Next, Please" is one of the short poems that talks of death and disappointment. Through our lives, we keep expecting that something wonderful would happen. We are "Always too eager for the future" and so "we pick up bad habits of expectance." We stand on a hillock, as it were, and watch armadas of promise approaching. They approach at their own pace, wasting a lot of time, refusing to make haste. But when the ships approach closer they never anchor but just move farther away: "No sooner present that it turns to past." We think that to compensate for our long wait, at least one of them would heave up and unload all good into our lives. But we are wrong. The protagonist has one inescapable conclusion from this:

> Only one ship is seeking us, a black-
>
> Sailed unfamiliar, towing at her back
>
> A huge and birdless silence. In her wake
>
> No waters breed or break. (Famouspoetsandpoems.com/poets/Philip- larkin/poems/14537)

That is the ship of death. This typical of the poems which talk of disappointment and death as the lot of man on this earth. This poem universalizes without a very strong individualization of the protagonist.

"Toads" is a poem on what one should make of one's life. A toad is a disgusting animal. IT can also refer to detestable person. The protagonist asks why he should let work or regular employment be the toad of his life. Why

shouldn't he use his wit as a pitchfork and throw the brute away from his life? Just for paying a few bills, we let this toad soil six days of our week. That is out of proportion. Many in this world live without doing anything, using only their wits: lecturers, idlers, louts. Many people live only on windfalls, from hand to mouth, but they don't mind it. Their bare-footed children, and their unspeakable wives, skinny perhaps, still live, and do not actually starve.

But then the protagonist feels that he doesn't have the courage to reject the pension that the government offers him. If only he could! Something like a toad squats in him, and its thighs squtting on his heart are heavy—like hard luck. It does not allow him to talk softly and caressingly t people, to win "fame, the girl and the money all at one sitting." When one has the choice between hard work and being just idle, it is hard to lose either! The point seems to be that one seldom has the choice to enjoy one's life. One is unable to throw away all temptations to sell one's freedom to convention and conformity. The tendency is to conform. It is painful that one desires to be free but has to compromise with bondage.

"Mr. Bleaney" is the record of dreary life. The protagonist goes to look up for a room for rent. The landlady takes him to the room and talks in a meanly clever way, laying down conditions without appearing to be doing that. The room is mean, poorly furnished. The surroundings are nothing inspiring. But yet the protagonist has to take it because he cannot afford anything better. It means that he has to compromise with inferiority and sordid poverty.

The landlady tells him that it was Mr. Bleaney's name. (The very name is something suggestive—like the names that Matthew Arnold spurned in his essay on the function of criticism at the present time.) She tells him that he lived in the room till he was transferred. But that doesn't seem to be any recommendation. The flowered curtains are of cheap material, old and short. There is a housing plot next to it, and it is the dumping ground for the neighbours. There is a bed, a hard chair, a sixty-watt bulb. There is no hook behind the door, no place for books or bags. But the landlady says that Mr. Bleaney was such a friendly person that he took the garden under his care. Noting everything, the protagonist still takes the room. He lies on the bed, now, on which Mr. Bleaney used to lie on, and throws his cigarette stubs into the broken saucer turned into an ash-tray. The wireless in the landlady's flat keeps blaring—the radio that Mr. Bleaney persuaded her to buy, it seems—by stuffing his ears with cotton. He is now familiar with all Mr. Bleaney's habits through the landlady's boring repetitions. The poor man had to live under these miserable circumstances, shivering in the cold with no blanket to keep him warm, and yet telling himself this was home. He might always have had the fear that the way in which one lived evaluates the value that one has achieved in one's life. B He might have been unhappy to think of the utter poverty of his life. We all live our lives that way: we can't do anything better. Suppressing our dreams so fiercely, we come to believe that the poor reality is all that there is to life, and are quite content with that.

"Afternoons" is a short poem that speaks of the ravages of time. The opening image in the first line is frightening: "Summer is fading …" The next few lines go on to expand what this involves: "The leaves fall in ones and twos/From trees bordering/The new recreation ground." Young mothers take their children in the free time of their afternoon to parks to play. (It is the summer of the lives of these young mothers that is fading.) Their husbands support them—with their skilled trades; the couple have all the dreary work of practical life to do, while their dreams lie closeby, laughing at them. The albums of their wedding and other dreamful events lying uncared for neat the television: their time is spent not in recollecting their dreams and getting any inspiration out of these; it is spent on watching television, in doing things that do not absorb their attention. The places where they fell in love with each other, all their joint pleasures, just wither away. Their children are absorbed in their own small cares. Their beauty thickens, and they get pushed to the side of their own lives.

“Days” is a very short poem, but also emphasizing the unenviable misery of the average life. Days are where we live, and they are to be happy in. We have nowhere else to live in. But how do we find that happiness in our days—in our life?

Ah, solving that question

Bring the priest and the doctor

In their long coats

Running over the fields.(www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/178046)

Our life is lost in our superstitions and in our illness: nothing really enjoyable or pleasant happens in our lives.

“Church Going” is one of the serious poems of Larkin. He presents himself as the average man. He enters a church on his way casually, when he has assured himself that “there’s nothing going on.” He finds that is one more church like any other church, nothing specially beautiful or impressive or inspiring. He sums everything up there very casually: matting. Seats, and stone, and little books, sprawling flowers from last Sunday, brownish now. He wonders whether it is cleaned or restored. He reads the writings on the wall, and sys Amen, unexpectedly loudly and is abashed. He reflects that the place was not worth stopping for.

Then why did he stop? He often does. And always he ends up like this: why did he stop here? He always wonders what we would with all these churches when nobody ever goes to them for their original purpose: “if we shall keep/A few cathedrals chronically on show, … / And let the rest rent-free to rain and sheep.” Or maybe people would avoid them as unlucky places; or superstitious mothers would take their children surreptitiously with the hole that they might be cured by touching something in the church. Power of some sort, inexplicable, would appear to continue in these places. But when even that superstition is dead, when even disbelief is dead, what will be the fate of these churches? Its purpose may become more and more obscure as time passes. One might feel that this place is now devoid of its “ghostly silt”—its spiritual assumptions. Yet we would tend to this place. It was the one place which cemented the relationships of life—though today only separations are marked. Marriage, birth and death were once new relationships. Somehow, he feels, standing here pleases him. It seems “A serious home on serious earth it is …” Our compulsive emotions find a home here. It satisfies some hunger in us.

This attitude is representative of modern man: who has lost his certain faith in religion and yet does not have the courage to let go of his belief in an emotional way. What Larkin has depicted is different from that of his early poets. He writes in a plain language even the ordinary men can understand easily, which is the ultimate philosophy of the Movement Poetry.

CONCLUSIONS

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